



Backcountry Beach Camping on Santa Rosa Island

Backcountry beach camping is available during certain times of year along Santa Rosa Island’s extensive, beautiful, and undeveloped 55-mile coast-line. This coastline is reminiscent of a California in days gone by. The intertidal pools and sandy beaches are much the same as the ones the early Chumash Indians, early explorers, and early ranchers may have known. They represent an important interface between land and sea. Many species of birds, marine mammals, and plant communities use these fragile areas to mate, breed, and forage in the undisturbed serenity found here.

The National Park Service opened the island to backcountry beach camping in recognition of its rare wilderness values. As you explore these wild areas by kayak or on foot, please take responsibility to help us protect and preserve these delicate natural resources for future generations. The following information will help you enjoy your visit while leaving the smallest impact on the island.

NOTE: Access to the island is restricted from mid-August through mid-December due to the annual private hunt for exotic (non-native) deer and elk. Visit our website or call for more information.

WARNING: While backcountry camping is an incredible experience, it is not for the inexperienced backpacker or kayaker. Due to difficult weather, rugged terrain, and off-trail hiking, backcountry camping is an arduous endeavor and should be undertaken only by experienced, well-conditioned backpackers and kayakers.

Destination and Distances

Please note that access is different for backpackers and kayakers due to the annual elk and deer hunt on the island (estimated dates: mid August through mid-December).

The concessionaire boats of Island Packers and Truth Aquatics usually drop off and pick up kayakers and backpackers at the pier near the ranch area in Bechers Bay. Channel Islands Aviation drops hikers at the end of the airstrip near Water Canyon, approximately one mile from the pier.

Hiking is along the beach, dirt roads, or unmaintained paths created by island animals. *These roads and paths are rugged and mountainous with no signs.* All distances that follow are approximate and measured from the pier, unless stated. Please refer to topographical maps for more accurate mileage and to help with the following descriptions. It is recommended that all backpackers purchase topographic maps (USGS 7.5 minute maps or the Trails Illustrated map of all the islands) and kayakers purchase nautical charts before departing on their journey.

In order to protect pupping seals/sea lions and nesting seabirds, all beaches are closed for camping between January 1 and May 31. Day use is permitted.

For kayakers and backpackers, the closest beach that is open to camping between June 1 and September 15 is just south of East Point, approximately 7 hiking miles and 8 kayaking miles from the pier. This beach is a small pocket beach and may be washed out at higher tides. In addition, pounding surf and strong winds constantly reshape this beach.

If hiking beyond East Point to Ford Point, it is recommended that you follow the ridge line or road until you reach the northeast ridge of San Augustine Canyon. Follow this ridge down to the mouth of the canyon. Hiking along the beach from East Point to Ford Point is impossible due to sections of vertical cliffs that drop directly into the ocean. However, kayakers can access beaches throughout this area. Once hikers reach Ford Point, they may follow the low terrace or higher ridge (both eventually run into a coastal road) down to the Johnsons Lee area. Refer to topographical maps for more details.

Direct access to beaches between Johnsons Lee and Ford Point (including La Jolla Vieja) is also possible via the Main/Soledad or South/Wreck road during certain times of year. Both of these routes are long hikes (see mileage chart to the right) with a considerable amount of climbing and, once again, like all hiking or kayaking on the island, is recommended only for the experienced, well-conditioned traveler.

During the annual elk and deer hunt (mid-August through mid-December), if you are backpacking to a beach campsite, you must observe the following guidelines:

- Check with a ranger on arrival for an on-site orientation.
- Only the beaches between East Point and South Point (Southeast Quadrant) are open to camping for backpackers. Hiking to other beach camping areas along the west or north coast is prohibited during the hunt.
- There are only two routes available from Becher’s Bay to reach this open camping area:
 - South/Wreck Road to reach Jolla Vieja and Ford Point beaches
 - South/Wreck Road to Clapp Spring Junction (Sierra Pablo Road) to access the ridge rout to San Augustine beach.

All other beach campers (whether backpacking, kayaking, or boating) must stay in the designated beach camping areas and restrict island day hiking to the immediate coastlines during the hunt period.

After September 15, the closest beach camping for kayakers is Lobo Canyon (approximately 6 kayaking miles from the pier). The beach at Lobo Canyon is small and may be washed out at higher tides. In addition, pounding surf and strong winds constantly reshape this beach.

Due to the hunt, backpackers may not visit this northwest coast until November 16th. The beach at Lobo Canyon is approximately 4.5 hiking miles from the pier. Areas of steep cliffs are found throughout the northwest side of the island (Carrington Point to Sandy Point) that make some beaches inaccessible to hikers. Hikers will find themselves climbing up and down ridges and canyons along parts of this coast. Steep cliffs and only a few small beaches are also present from South Point to China Camp. West of China Camp, hikers can walk along the beach until the Sandy Point closure. Refer to topographical maps for more details.

Hiking Distances

Destination (from pier unless stated)	Approximate distance in miles	
	Hiking	Kayaking
East Point	7	8
East Point to Ford Point	8	5
Ford Point to Johnsons Lee	4	3.5
Johnsons Lee (via East Point)	18	16
Johnsons Lee via main road	14	--
Johnsons Lee via south road	13.5	--
La Jolla Vieja via south road	11.2	--
Lobo Canyon	4.5	6

Water

Since the water in the streams is contaminated with coliform bacteria and giardia, it is recommended that you boil, filter, and/or add iodine to the water. (Potable water is available in the Water Canyon campground.) Water is generally available in island canyons during the winter and early spring. Although nine canyons carry some degree of water throughout the year (except during dry years), water is not always available at the

mouth of the canyons near the beach. These nine canyons include: Water, Old Ranch House (intermittent), San Augustine, Wreck, Jolla Vieja, Arlington, Soledad, Cow (intermittent), and Lobo (intermittent). Clapp Spring, near the top of San Augustine Canyon, also has water year-round. Look for the spigot just down the road from the actual spring.

Weather

Backpackers and kayakers should be prepared for strong northwest winds throughout the year, with the possibility of strong east or Santa Ana winds from October through January. The average wind speed is 15 knots, although speeds of 40 to 50 knots are not uncommon. Occasionally, the south side of the island (South Point to East Point) offers protection from these strong winds.

Dense fog is common during the summer months, but may occur at any time, making chart and compass navigation mandatory. Weather conditions are generally best from August through October, with relatively calm wind and sea conditions and virtually no rain. Ocean water temperatures range from the lower 50s (°F) in the winter to the upper 60s (°F) in the fall.

Kayakers may encounter strong ocean currents around the islands. Intense wave and surf conditions exist around the Carrington Point area. Sheer cliffs rise out of the ocean, reflecting incoming waves back out to sea, creating a washing machine effect. In this turbulent area there are no places to land, even in an emergency. The first landable beach is Lobo Canyon, five miles west of the ranch area pier. Rounding Skunk Point may be tricky as well because of merging currents. The wind often increases in the afternoon, and the prevailing northwesterlies can make paddling back to Water Canyon difficult. During the summer months, large swells often pound the south side of the island, making landing and launching from the beaches extremely challenging, requiring advanced skills.

Regulations and Guidelines

The protection and preservation of your park’s biological and cultural resources is the mission of the National Park Service. By following the regulations and guidelines in “Limiting Your Impact”, you can help protect these rare and unique treasures for future generations to enjoy. For a more complete description of “Leave No Trace” principles, visit <http://www.lnt.org/>.

- Guidelines:
- Utilize sandy areas that are free of dune vegetation when hiking, landing water craft, and camping. Keep tents, kitchen areas, and traffic in “hardened” areas that are already bare from previous use.
 - Strain or separate food particles from cooking water and pack them out. Scatter the gray water 200 ft. from water sources and camps.
 - Minimize soap use to keep the backcountry free of chemicals. If washing with soap, rinse 200 ft. from water sources.
 - Do not damage live trees, plants, and other living things. It is not permitted to chop or nail trees, harvest or trample plants.

- Regulations:
- Camping is prohibited year-round between Carrington and East Point, except in the Water Canyon campground.
 - From March 1 to September 15, the coastline from and including Skunk Point to just before East Point is closed to landing or hiking to protect the nesting area for the snowy plover, a federally listed, threatened shorebird.
 - The beaches around Sandy Point are closed to all access year-round.
 - Bury human waste in individual catholes 6-8 inches deep in the moist, sandy, intertidal area and 200 feet from fresh water sources. Do not deposit in dry sand on beach or in archeological sites. Toilet paper must be packed out. Waste can also be deposited 100 yards offshore.
 - No fires are allowed.

Reservations

Backcountry campers must first secure boat or air transportation to Santa Rosa through the park’s concessionaires or by their own private vessel. Camping reservations are required for beach camping. Reservations are free and must be obtained in advance by calling Channel

Islands National Park at (805) 658-5711. Separate camping reservations are needed for the established campground at Water Canyon and must be obtained in advance by calling (800) 365-CAMP (2267) or through the Internet at <http://reservations.nps.gov>.

